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ABSTRACT

In the United States and other countries experiencing large influxes of immigrants, how to acknowledge and address the increased diversity has been a challenge for early childhood education. This article explores the use of children's literature in this process, and includes a brief description and evaluation of five culturally diverse children's books. The article begins with a discussion of the benefits of children's literature and the history of cultural diversity within children's books. It continues with a description of the country's move from the cultural concept of a melting pot to that of a tossed salad, and then proposes definitions for "multicultural," "culturally diverse," and "cross-cultural" that can be applied in evaluating children's books. The article then assesses five books within the framework of these definitions, including "Everyone Cooks Rice" (Dooley), "I Speak English for My Mom" (Gomez), and "Amazing Grace" (Hoffman). It concludes with a description of the avenues of support available to educators implementing cultural diversity in the classroom. Contains 22 references. (EV)

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LET'S ADD R.I.C.E. (RELEVANT, INTERCULTURAL, CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES) TO OUR CURRICULUM MENU!

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Curriculum in Early Childhood Education

The field of early childhood education attracts people who combine a respect for individuality and the uniqueness of human growth in the first period of development. Understanding that children originate with an egocentric awareness, planned activities for them should therefore center around relevant experiences during early years. These projects are often combined with topical themes that provide a basis for curriculum development.

Teachers understand that children begin with a self centered focus and through experiences, nurturing, and a thoughtfully and carefully prepared environment, the stage is set for optimal learning. As early as the 1920's, Lucy S. Mitchell referred to this approach to planning for learning as an "expanding curriculum" (Mitchell, 1928). It starts with the knowledge that a child has about him or herself, then his/her family and community and eventually, about his/her knowledge of global connections.

Literature and Cultures in Early Childhood Education

One of the important vehicles for providing early childhood curricula activities is through the use of literature (Rochman, 1995; Willett, 1995). Quality

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books include themes that are important to the child - issues such as trust, acceptance and self esteem (Salvadore, 1995).

A significant benefit of introducing children to a wide range of literature is that they can see their lifestyles validated and at the same time gain a broader vision and acceptance of individual likenesses and differences (Hsu, 1995). Early childhood educators recognize and support the impact that activities and related literature can have on the positive identity and attitude towards others that are developed in these years (Fereshteh, 1995; Winter, 1994).

A great deal of the literature published before the mid-eighties seemed to have minorities included as an after thought and in ways that did not provide accurate indications of a specific race, culture or gender. They were often viewed as the "bad guys", threatening figures, or sources of ridicule. Books representing diverse groups often included stereotypic behaviors. Sexist role typing was common.

Few reference texts and research articles on multicultural literature were available for adults. As early as 1965, Nancy Larrick wrote a journal article entitled *The All White World of Children's Books*. Larrick surveyed 63 mainstream publishers who had published a combined total of 5,200 children's books between 1962-1964. African-American characters appeared in only 6.7 % of those books either in text or illustrations. Larrick's article, which coincided with the civil rights movement in the United States and the rise of African-American activism, underscored the need for quality literature that included minorities.

Fondue to Tossed Salad

During the great immigration of the early 1900's, the identity fostered in the United States was that of a melting pot (Jameyson, 1995; Lee, 1995). The "melting pot" was a phrase used to symbolize assimilation of all the cultures present in the United States. In order to obtain success and prestige, conformity to a single cultural model was required. Heritage was not a source of pride - it was considered a part of the past (Miller-Lachman, 1992). Today, the analogy is that the richness and substance resulting from a mixture of people more closely represents a tossed salad or a quilt.

In the United States and other countries experiencing large influxes of immigrants, how to acknowledge and address the increased diversity has been a challenge in perception and planning (Cornwell & Stoddard, 1994). Early childhood educators have found guidance in the book **The Anti-Bias Curriculum** by Louise Derman-Sparks and the A.B.C. Task Force (1989). Attitudes about people and differences result from a child's first experiences at home and at school. If a children are treated with high regard and have a

positive self image, then, as the "curriculum" of ideas is presented to them, they should grow into adults who value and respect others.

Expanded Multicultural Lens and Literature

With the understanding that there are many cultures and much to learn, questions arise about how to foster pride in one's heritage and at the same time enhance appreciation and respect for others (Bruchac, 1995). A book is selected not because it is "multicultural" but because it is book that is relevant to the experiences and developmental issues present in the early childhood years (Aronson, 1995).

The depth of this issue suggests that an expanded set of multicultural definitions could be applied to the use of literature and could contribute to effective planning. **Multicultural** literature would refer to a mix of cultures within one country. Literature that is **culturally diverse** would include what is unique to an individual culture, yet universal to all. **Cross-cultural** literature would describe that there is an international exchange from one country to another.

Table 1. Application to Curriculum Planning.

Title	Multicultural Lit	Culturally Diverse Lit	Cross Cultural Lit
Amazing Grace		Positive self-esteem	
Everybody Cooks Rice	Preparation of ethnic rice dishes	Food preparation and eating of a rice dish	Rice Sampling from different cultures/ acceptance
How My Parents Learned to Eat	Manners and use of eating utensils	Eating habits and manners/self-esteem/acceptance	Mastery of other cultures' eating utensils
Mama, Do You Love Me?		Love, trust & approval from mother	Inuit context
You be Me, I'll Be You		Selfesteem & acceptance	
I Speak English for My Mother	Translation of a language	Love of mother/ childcompetence	

The chart crosses these expanded definitions and identifies the developmental issue in the story. Applying the childhood themes of trust, acceptance, self esteem and other relevant early childhood content areas, this chart shows how books can be used with increasing complexity in classroom curricula. With both life experience and exposure to appropriate

materials, the children's understanding of the world around them becomes more intricate and abstract.

For example, in the book entitled **Everyone Cooks Rice** by Nora Dooley, many cultures are represented eating rice dishes particular to their heritage. Within the framework of this book, the theme of food preparation embraces all three categories cited in the chart. Another piece of children's literature where food is the focus is in, **How My Parents Learned to Eat** by Ina Friedman. Manners and the manipulation of utensils are important developmental tasks during a child's early years. The story follows an American man and a Japanese woman learning how to use a fork, a knife, a spoon and chopsticks. The result is that their daughter is able to successfully adapt to the eating customs of her Japanese and U.S. heritage.

Positive interaction with a parent is seen in Joose's **Mama Do You Love Me?** Children of all ages ask for reassurance of a mother's love, trust and approval. Although the costumes and objects illustrated in the pages are indigenous to the Inuit culture, the message is universal.

Another parenting theme is the need for children to be independent. In the book, **I Speak English For My Mom,** Lupe Gomez must translate from English to Spanish for her mother. Lupe is supportive, but she sometimes admits that she would like to play or go to school instead of interpreting for her mother.

Children of all ages can identify with the desire to change themselves and be somebody different. In the book, **You Be Me and I'll Be You**, a father and child conspire to alter their appearances. After a series of incidents which end with the disapproval of their antics from mother, they decide that being themselves is best.

Being yourself is also featured in **Amazing Grace** by Mary Hoffman. Grace, an African-American child has a vivid imagination. She acts out fantasies where she is always the heroine. When she has an opportunity to try out for the role of Peter Pan, she wins the part in spite of the fact that she had initially been told by her classmates that Peter Pan was a white boy.

Avenues of support for Practitioners

Attitude formation and change requires willingness, openness and support (Ramsey, 1982). When individuals consider the impact of their actions, reflective practice results (Schon, 1983). Members of the early care and education community have many sources from which to draw inspiration for this type of professional development.

Conferences provide opportunities for practitioners and researchers in the global early care and education community to share interests and concerns. Association involvement at all levels are wellsprings of information, collegiality and leadership opportunities.

The availability of technology provides a world wide communication network. There are on-line discussion groups that address early childhood issues in policy, curriculum, children's literature and a host of other topics. Electronic transfer of information facilitates action research and enables groups from all over the world to work together.

By modeling respect of others and adapting intercultural activities within the curriculum, early childhood educators can provide a long lasting contribution to peace and tolerance for all.

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